
THE BENEFITS OF USING ADVENTURE EDUCATION TO FACILITATE DIALOGUE IN SOCIAL WORK DIVERSITY TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

Social workers are confronted with diversity in their daily practice, and the significance of understanding diversity in all its forms is reflected in its inclusion in the BSW program outcomes (South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), 2012). However, some people in society do not value diversity, which leads to minority groups' experiencing intolerance and low levels of social justice. Qualitative research was conducted with social work students with the purpose of performing an analysis of the possible benefits of using adventure activities to determine if this could contribute to teaching social work students about diversity issues since it forms part of the BSW curriculum. This activity also assisted students to face their biases and misconceptions of others and to recognise the myriad diversity factors that exist in society. However, the focus of this article is on how the activity contributed to explaining and discussing diversity. Participants reckoned that it was a meaningful aid in explaining diversity. Sensitivity towards diverse groups and the need to respect their differences were also cultivated. Lastly, the strengths of using an activity to teach diversity were identified. This research showed that adventure-based activities could be a valuable aid when teaching emotionally loaded topics and facilitating dialogues on these topics.

Keywords: adventure education, dialogue, adventure activity, experiential learning, diversity, diversity training

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a very diverse country comprised of people from different racial and ethnic groups, and has 11 official languages, not to mention the diversity experienced within these different groups. Within this context, the Bill of Rights forbids discrimination against any person on the grounds of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (South Africa, 1996). This rights-based, anti-discriminatory focus demands that social workers be diversity sensitive in their practice (Ross, 2010).

Social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice as one of the primary values of social work (South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), 2015; Peabody, 2013; International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), 2004). This includes ensuring that discrimination does not take place and, when it does, the social worker must challenge it (IASSW, 2004). This refers to the practice of upholding and protecting basic human rights; providing for equal opportunities, obligations and social benefits for all citizens, especially the disadvantaged; and ensuring that resources are distributed equitably (Patel, 2005).

However, some people in the community at large do not value diversity, and intolerance is experienced often by those who deviate from the 'norm' (De Wet and Jacobs, 2013; Whitaker, 2002). In order to promote tolerance for diversity in social work students, it is important to hold deep, sometimes life-changing conversations. Dialogues differ from debates or general conversations in that they are able to reach deeper levels of understanding. The dialoguing process is guided by a facilitator with the main goal of understanding and learning about different perspectives. During this process, participants listen to one another while trying to understand how their personal experiences have shaped their beliefs. These experiences are accepted as real and valid because they are owned by the individual. People work together to develop a common understanding of the topic, and strong emotions such as anger and sadness are deemed appropriate when people share the intensity of an experience or belief (Schirch and Campt, 2007).

Many well-known techniques can be applied during dialogues, for example, circle processes, interviews in the presence of the whole group, role reversal presentations, appreciative inquiry, sort cards, brainstorming, fishbowl, open-sentence dialogue, timeline stories and study circles (Kraybill and Write, 2006). During this research, a social-responsibility activity called apples and a pear was used (Chappelle and Bigman, 1998). Other types of activities includes ice breakers, de-inhibiter activities, trust and empathy activities, communication activities and decision-making and problem solving activities (Chappelle and Bigman, 1998; Schoel, Prouty and Radcliffe, 1988). Social responsibility activities provide an opportunity for open discussion on issues such as bias, prejudice, discrimination and building relationships. These activities also aim to open communication channels to make participants aware of the social implications of their behaviour (Chappelle and Bigman, 1998).

When participants reflect on their experiences during activities in adventure-based learning, personal growth is assumed to be taking place. This links to experiential learning, because cognitive and/or behaviourist instruction is being given during the process of participation in activities and in the subsequent reflection on what occurred during the activities (Oppen, 2013; Priest and Gass, 1997).

Although they are familiar with dialogue techniques, some educators still use the classic lecture to teach students (Witkin, 2014). The aim of this article is to discuss the possible benefits of using adventure activities, not just to facilitate learning, but also to change attitudes towards contentious topics such as diversity. For these purposes, an adventure-based activity rooted in adventure education and experiential learning, was used in facilitating a dialogue on diversity (Beard and Wilson, 2013; Gerstein, 2012; Chappelle and Bigman, 1998). A literature review, followed by an empirical study, illustrates some of the main benefits of experiential adventure-based activities and how they contribute to exploring diversity issues.

LITERATURE STUDY

Social work education is demanding because it includes a variety of learning components. Thus, in training social workers, the focus should be on the development of knowledge, skills and a positive attitude that benefit the clients when a social worker enters the field (SAQA, 2012). To ensure that training is effective, an assortment of teaching methods could be used. Adventure education adds another dimension to teaching, as it bridges the gap between theory and active learning through experience and self-discovery (Chappelle and Bigman, 1998). A major strength of the use of activities is that they have the potential to help students develop empathy towards clients of diverse social and cultural backgrounds (Cramer, Ryosho and Nguyen, 2012). Furthermore, activities used in adventure education ensure a memorable emotional impact, integrate an awareness of diversity and encourage self-care and personal wellness (Bockian, 2012). Lastly, because the use of activities in social work groups are already well established (Tucker, 2009), lecturers could productively teach group work skills by modelling to students how these activities should be applied.

The literature on dialogue does not specifically refer to adventure education as an option or technique (Schirch and Campt, 2007; Kraybill and Write, 2006). Although some writers mention activities, their value in creating dialogue is not discussed (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005). Regarding diversity training, Seaman, Beightol, Shirilla and Crawford (2009) refer to research emphasising the benefits of experiential activities in diversity training, specifically focusing on racial and ethnic differences. However, they mention that the ability of these activities to positively affect participants' appreciation for diversity still needs further investigation. Other researchers discuss activities in the context of complex issues such as diversity, but do not explain why they are so effective (Chappelle and Bigman, 1998). Thus, a gap is evident in the research on the benefits of adventure education as an educational technique in discussing complex topics.

Adventure education is a branch of outdoor education which is primarily concerned with the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. The aim is for participants to understand concepts and become aware of previously unknown needs. When engaging in adventure education, the participants change their thought patterns, develop trust in other group members and improve their communication. This learning, that is experiential in nature, is then transferred to other life situations such as the classroom, work and personal environments (Harper, 2010; Priest and Gass, 1997).

The concept of 'adventure' brings to mind images of nature, adrenalin rushes and physical risks. Although 'artificial adventure environments' are also created, such as ropes courses

and group initiatives, which provide the group with tasks to accomplish (Priest, 1990), adventure education does not need to include adventurous activities in the real sense of the word. Instead, 'adventure' should be viewed as a way of doing an activity and not as the specific content of the activity. The challenge of the adventure activity could test the individuals' competence against physical, social and mental risks. This means that any environment could potentially be adventurous or challenging, providing it consists of the elements of risk and surprise, of taking participants beyond their normal limits, and of doing the seemingly impossible. The product of adventure education is personal growth and development that is related to interpersonal and intrapersonal growth (Reyneke, 2009; Priest, 1990).

Adventure activities provide the group with captivating tasks to be accomplished (Priest and Gass, 1997). Using the Project Adventure model, activities usually include warm-ups, get-to-know-you's, team building, communication, decision making and problem solving, and warm-downs (Project Adventure, 1995). Chappelle and Bigman (1998) also categorise these activities, but defined the different groups of activities as ice breakers, de-inhibitisers, trust building, group initiative and problem solving, social responsibility, and closing activities. Although the grouping of activities differ, the literature is clear that there are many different activities that can be used during adventure education programmes (Aubrey, 2009; Chappelle and Bigman, 1998; Project Adventure, 1995; Rohnke and Butler, 1995; Rohnke, 1989, 1984). In addition, research has shown that using these activities can lead to positive outcomes during adventure education (Mckenzie, 2000). However, it should be noted that there are also critics that argue that adventure education is not as effective as many adventure educators would like to think (Bowen, 2013; Harper, 2010).

Facilitated adventure experiences can be used to enhance learning and can be applied in educational (physical and academic) and recreational programmes (Brendtro and Strother, 2007; Priest and Gass, 1997). Some of the key components of adventure-based therapy, which are also relevant to adventure education, are interpersonal learning, social skills development, concrete and immediate consequences, problem solving, the novel environment in which these activities takes place, and emotional and physical safety considerations (Tucker, 2009).

In order for the above to effectively take place, high levels of processing are needed (Cramer et al., 2012). Adventure education programmes consist of two overall components: action (activity) and reflection (processing) (Simpson, Miller, and Bocher, 2006). Processing is a structured action when participants 'plan, reflect, describe, analyse and communicate about experiences' (Luckner and Nadler, 1997). Reflection on what occurred during the activity takes place in order to ensure that participants optimally learn from this experience and are able to generalise the learning to other settings (Simpson et al., 2006; Luckner and Nadler, 1997). The experiential learning theory is mainly used during this reflection process.

Experiential exercises are not new to social work. Role-plays, case studies, group activities and fieldwork are commonly used in the training of social justice and human diversity (Cramer et al., 2012). These exercises can be categorised broadly into three models: experiencing (experience life from the perspective of the oppressed), self-discovering (discover own bias and cultural identity), and learning (deepen knowledge of life experiences of diverse populations) (Cramer et al., 2012). Participation in experiential

education is believed to increase appreciation for diversity and to motivate, inspire and empower participants to gain valuable learning experiences (Gerstein, 2012; Seaman et al., 2009).

The experiential learning cycle stresses that the nature of experience is crucial in education and training (Gerstein, 2012). This implies that the teacher should create meaningful experiences to the learners and further engage them in learning. Importantly, the activity alone will not be sufficient to facilitate the learning; some form of reflection is needed on the activity and the learner's experience during the activity to ensure that it was, in fact, meaningful. This process should be well planned and not left to chance (Gerstein, 2012; Simpson et al., 2006).

Actively engaging is one of the basic elements of experiential learning. In the process of being engaged in the activity, the learner becomes holistically involved through thoughts, feelings and physical activity (Beard and Wilson, 2013). However, people learn in different ways. Using the VARK-model, some learn through visual information (V); some through aural information (A); some through the written word (R); and some through kinaesthetic experience (K) (Khanal, Shah and Koirala, 2014). It is submitted that adventure activities could incorporate most, if not all, of these learning modalities and will engage the learner in deeper learning experiences.

The greatest strength of experiential learning is that it provides a philosophical framework joining many learning theories into a whole (Beard and Wilson, 2013). This ensures real learning that influences knowledge, attitude and skill.

In experiential learning a range of lifeless objects could be used to help people project their thoughts and feelings. Projection onto an object seems to help prevent embarrassment that people might experience when directly talking to a person about a problem or issue (Beard and Wilson, 2013). In this study, the apples and a pear became the metaphor for being different. It also explored people's feelings when they experienced themselves as different from others. This is in line with the approach followed by experiential educationists in experiential learning as well as in adventure education. Other techniques that they use draw on drama, sculpting, role-play, art, stories and metaphors (Beard and Wilson, 2013).

METHOD

In this qualitative study, the research design was exploratory and descriptive as it explored and described a particular phenomenon. In this case the personal experiences of the participants, while engaging in an adventure-based experiential activity (Rubin and Babbie, 2011). The purpose of this study was to perform an analysis of the possible benefits of using adventure activities to determine if this could contribute to teaching social work students about diversity issues that form part of the BSW curriculum.

Given the purpose of the study the following research questions gave direction to the investigation:

- What are the possible benefits of using adventure activities to facilitate learning?
- Could the use of an adventure activity help change participants attitude towards contentious topics such as diversity?

Since all the participants attended modules in which diversity issues in social work were being discussed, a convenience sample was used (Rubin and Babbie, 2011). It consisted of 50 second-year and 55 fourth-year social work students in the Department of Social Work at a South African university. It was believed that the findings would yield a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the adventure-based experience on the dialogues on diversity issues (Rubin and Babbie, 2011).

Table 1: Participant profile

	Gender		Ethnicity			Language of instruction	
	Male	Female	Black	White	Coloured	English	Afrikaans
Second years	4	35	29	5	5	31	8
Fourth years	6	44	38	8	4	41	9

The population, mainly women, were mostly from an African cultural background, but also included a small group of white and coloured participants. The University where this study took place makes use of parallel medium classes. The majority of participants attended classes in English, with some attending the Afrikaans classes. With the permission of the students, that was preceded by thorough discussions on the need for class discussions in diverse groups, the language groups were combined into one class during this activity. They were also encouraged to work in small groups that were as diverse as possible. The participants divided themselves into smaller groups of their choice. This activity and the discussion of what transpired took place in two 50 minute classes, one for the second years and one for the fourth years. Since these students knew one another and there were a trusting relationship between themselves and the lecturer, it was deemed a safe environment to discuss these issues. A Full value contract was also in place to ensure emotional safety (Gass, Gillis and Russell, 2012; Rohnke, 1984).

The activity called Apples and a Pear was used for the purpose of this research (adapted from Chappelle and Bigman, 1998). This is a contextualised projective technique that involves the use of a bag of apples and a pear to facilitate discussion about diversity.

The activity involves three phases: briefing, identification and manipulation. During the briefing an opening statement about the universality of feeling different or excluded are discussed. The participants then reflect on how they feel when they feel different or excluded and how they anticipate others might feel on being treated as an ‘outsider’.

During the identification phase the pile of apples is centrally displayed and the class is requested to brainstorm and make notes about the characteristics of apples. Small groups of four to five participants are subsequently formed and each group is given an apple to study. The group makes notes of all unique characteristics currently visible on the apple, after which the apples are returned to the pile and a few extra apples are added. A representative of each group is then asked to identify the group’s apple. The identification is confirmed by the group and explained to the rest of the class.

The last phase, manipulation, involves the creation of a series of scenarios by rearranging the apples. The students are asked to close their eyes while the facilitator places the apples in a circle; puts one apple aside; puts another apple with the single apple; adds a pear to the circle of apples; then puts the pear aside. Facilitating questions are asked after each repositioning, for example, 'What did you see when first opening your eyes? How do you think the apples are feeling? How does the single apple feel?' (Chappelle and Bigman, 1998).

After the activity, participants completed a voluntary reflective assignment that reflected on two questions: (1) Could this activity be used to help others understand diversity? Explain how you think you could use this and; (2) if you look at the activity, do you think that it helped you personally to discuss diversity issues with others? If so, explain how it helped you.

Following a discussion of the need for and the protocol of the research, 89 students voluntarily signed a consent form giving permission for the assignments to be used for research purposes. Confidentiality was ensured by making working copies of the assignments, but not their identifying particulars, after which the originals were returned to the owners (Rubin and Babbie, 2011).

This study was conducted in six steps (Creswell, 2009). During Step 1, the data were organised and prepared. The analysis was performed with the aid of NVivo 10. Step 2 included reading through the data and obtaining a general impression of the information. In Step 3, analysis commenced by abstracting obvious themes from the transcripts, the beginning of the coding process. The codes were developed as they emerged during the analysis. Step 4 followed a coding process to refine and determine themes for analysis. The themes were clustered into three main themes and some sub-themes, which are the major findings of the research. Step 5 entailed a narrative of the findings of the analysis. In the last step meaning was ascribed to the themes, mainly by using adventure based- and experiential learning theory.

There are four criteria that can contribute to trustworthiness - namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Credibility was achieved by ensuring honesty of students (anonymity of participants, they could have refused to take part in the study, and they could have withdrawn at any stage). Member checks took place with the fourth year group, unfortunately the second year group was not available. Furthermore, the prolonged engagement with the participants and the rich description of the findings and the detailed discussion of the data-collection also contribute to strengthening credibility (Niewenhuis, 2016; Creswell, 2009; Shenton, 2004). Transferability was achieved through the description of the information collected. Participants are also typical to the context being studied and the researcher has a complete understanding of the context being studied since he had been lecturing students and doing adventure based work for more than 10 years (Niewenhuis, 2016). In order to increase dependability, the researcher used a codebook to prevent a shift in the meaning of the codes during the coding process. Two coders were used and their results were compared during the coding process (Creswell, 2009). However, one of the limitations of this study was that the researcher did not keep a journal of all the decisions made during the research process, during the data collection and the process of analysing the data. Lastly, confirmability was improved through member checking and the neutral colleague who independently analysed the assignments apart from the researcher's analysis (Niewenhuis, 2016; Rubin and Babbie,

2011). The findings were richly described to produce a realistic and richer description of what transpired (Creswell, 2009). Lastly, both positive and negative information was discussed in order to provide a balanced perspective of the information gathered (Creswell, 2009).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The most prominent themes included the helpfulness of the activity to assist others in understanding diversity, helpfulness for the individual to understand diversity, and how the strengths of the activity contributed to understanding diversity. Some of the quotes were in Afrikaans and were translated verbatim.

Theme A: Helping others to understand diversity

The majority of the participants felt that the activity would help them to explain diversity to others. Most of them said that they would use it with their clients in settings such as pre-schools, schools (working with adolescents), university (working with students), religious environments, workplace and with people with disabilities. Some said they would use it to explain diversity to their friends and the general public.

Only one participant said it did not help because, during the activity, the participant battled to understand that the discussion was about diversity: *'Only at the end of the activity during the reflection of the activity it became clear that it was about diversity.'* As a solution, the person proposed that the facilitator be clear about the aim at the beginning of the activity. Although some front-loading occurred (Gass et al., 2012), it seems that this person needed more framing of the activity to understand the focus and more personal time to prepare (Luckner and Nadler, 1997).

Theme B: Helping the individual understand diversity

Participants were asked to reflect on how the activity helped them personally to understand diversity. Some felt that the activity was not helpful (a–b), whereas most felt that it contributed to their improved understanding of the concept (c–e).

a. No issue with diversity

Of the few participants who did not feel that the activity contributed to their knowledge of diversity, most of them reasoned that *'I have never really had a problem discussing diversity to others'* and *'I have never had issues with discussing diversity with anyone; people think it's a complex issue, I think it's an interesting topic to look at especially with diverse groups.'* This could show that people who are open to diversity feel different about discussing it. One participant felt comfortable about discussing diversity issues because *'this openness started in the home that I grew up in.'* Having frequent open discussions on diversity could probably increase people's self-confidence in discussing this topic.

b. Over sensitivity to diversity

One participant felt that a topic such as diversity is sensitive and that it makes people anxious. It was further felt that, because it is such a complex issue, it should not be

discussed: *'I don't think the activity helped me to discuss diversity issues with others because, to a lot of people diversity is still a sensitive topic that causes people to become anxious. It's an issue that people do not feel comfortable discussing, even me. Personally I think something are better off left alone if it means they awaken negative feeling for other people.'* One of the reasons why the activity was used was to provide a safe environment for the participants to discuss this loaded issue. This is in line with the characteristics of a dialogue where the facilitator needs to ensure a safe space (Schirch and Camp, 2007). On the other hand, communicating over racial and ethnic barriers can be distressing to people and make them feel misunderstood or attacked (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005; Miller, Donner and Fraser, 2004); therefore, facilitators should ensure emotional safety. It cannot be presumed that an activity where diversity is discussed indirectly would create a safe space where all participants would feel comfortable.

Most of the participants experienced the activity as helpful. The following four sub-themes describe how the activity helped the participants to understand diversity.

c. Improved insight into diversity and awareness of own prejudice

When discussing diversity, it seems that most people think about cultural diversity. The reason for this might be because people interpret, explain and understand others through the lens of race, class and culture (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005). In this article, diversity is seen in a broader context and can be defined as the differences among human beings. According to Chappelle and Bigman (1998), this includes differences in race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, gender, class, and physical appearance. Diversity, according to them, goes even further and includes physical characteristics, mannerisms, facial expressions, style of dress, language, communication styles, gestures, geographic location, work experience, lifestyles, learning styles and personality.

This activity helped the participants understand that diversity is not just about race. *'I understand better now that the aim of diversity is striving to defeat religious discrimination, racial discrimination, age discrimination, fear, harassment and negative attitude that people have towards each other.'* The concept of 'diversity' and social work's fight for social justice (Patel, 2005) was emphasised for this participant.

Social workers see as their task the protection of people who are 'different' by ensuring their social and physical well-being (SACSSP, 2015). However, before embarking on this endeavour, they need to be comfortable with diversity and have a fair understanding of their own and other people's prejudice (Ross, 2010). Social work educators, thus, have the task of ensuring that students explore diversity perspectives, recognise and investigate their assumptions and develop an appreciation for the differences in people. In order to facilitate this process, students and lecturers need to sometimes engage in difficult discussions.

In creating a better understanding of diversity, many participants became more conscious of who they are (Miller et al., 2004) and that they might have been prejudiced towards others: *'The activity made me look beyond the colour issue especially since I have always had the perception that all white people are fake when they are nice to a person of colour. It made me realise that I have prejudged people in a negative manner,'* and *'I always had a picture of diversity and was confronted with how I see it, I realised that I discriminated against*

other people because they were different from myself.' The above realisations are powerful and would probably increase these student social workers' awareness of the effect of their actions towards others.

d. Insight into people's experiences and needs

Dialogues with people who are different from us could provide insight into our own values, perspectives, patterns of thinking and biases. Furthermore, it could improve empathy towards others and increased understanding of people's beliefs, as well as the reason for these beliefs. Lastly, it could reduce division and improve communication patterns (Schirch and Camp, 2007). More dialogue could contribute to better understanding of own prejudice and help people to manage their feelings appropriately; thus, improving their emotional awareness (Kano, 2013).

The following shows how the students' dialogue created more insight into another cultural group: *'During our class discussion I came to understand that the white student do want to interact with us blacks but are also afraid of the judgmental looks or reactions that they would get from us, they often do not know how to approach us or start a conversation, this I found out by asking them why do they always seem to want to sit in their own little corner instead of mixing with others. These are also thoughts black students have about fellow white students. Overall it indicates the similarities that we have though we are different (we all have the same perception about one another). I think we should do these activities more often as they will help integration at varsity.'*

Some also referred to how it became easier for them to share their own stories, when others shared theirs. This created more insight: *'Getting other people's insights also made me aware of new things that I wasn't aware of.'* The value of hearing these stories also echoed: *'The activity helped me to realise that you may talk about it [diversity] and that it is valuable to hear each other's opinions and ideas on diversity'* and *'Everyone in the group had a different perspective about diversity and it created an opportunity to learn from each other.'*

Another strong theme was the realisation that *'we are all human beings.'* Some participants felt that their eyes were opened to see that *'even though we are different, we are all human'* and that *'we can still live together in harmony and treat each [other] like the equals that we are.'* A strength that emerged was that the participants did not only focus on differences, but also started to see similarities between them and others. Thus, the activity helped them to gain insight into their own perspectives, patterns of thinking, values and biases (Schirch and Camp, 2007).

e. Increased sensitivity and respectfulness

During dialogues, participants are encouraged to develop skills such as active listening, speaking honestly about experiences and opinions while remaining sensitive towards others (Schirch and Camp, 2007). In the current research, students remarked that the activity helped them to *'be more sensitive about how others see things,'* and *'[become] aware that I have to be more aware and very careful not to let others feel excluded because they are different from me.'* Sensitivity for others was, thus, cultivated.

Difficult conversations on topics related to interpersonal conflict, social identity, diversity and social justice can be challenging. Participants can feel alienated, attacked, misunderstood and even victimised if these conversations do not take place in a safe environment (Miller et al., 2004). When people experience these feelings, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to have tough conversations. Miller et al. (2004) claim that meaningful conversations about differences provide an alternative to resolving problems, which makes wars, genocide, segregational policies, slavery and ethnic cleansing redundant. Therefore, in communities with high levels of diversity such as South Africa, these dialogues are vital, especially because they lead to empathy, concern and respect for others. In this activity and the dialogue that ensued, respect for others developed: *'It made me appreciate our differences because we are from different races, religions, cultures and ethnicities and that I should respect that, and only through acceptance and respect I will be able to embrace diversity.'*

Theme C: Strengths of the activity in understanding diversity issues

a. The metaphor

Although the use of metaphors is a distinguishing element of adventure therapy (Newes and Brandoroff, 2004), Gass and Priest (2006) could find little empirical evidence that indicated the value of metaphors. In this research, the metaphoric model was used to help with the processing of learning (Mckenzie, 2000), and the metaphor of the apples and a pear did seem to contribute to the success of the activity.

Responses from participants regarding the strengths of the activity revealed that it provided a visual metaphor that is remembered easily: *'This activity provides a metaphoric way to make people see the dynamics of diversity and consequences of group conformity.'* The metaphoric value of the activity was echoed by many participants, claiming this as one of the major strengths of the activity. This, in turn, confirms that using metaphors during processing is an effective technique (Cummings and Anderson, 2010).

b. Speaking without fear

There are many reasons why people do not speak during difficult dialogues, for example, introversion, fear of appearing stupid, feeling unprepared, feeling unwelcome, bad experiences, a lack of reward and reliance on the teacher to do the talking (Brookfield and Preskill, 2005). This activity helped the participants to speak about diversity without fear: *'Using fruits is an excellent idea because it makes one feel less intimidated and allows one to express themselves freely without fear of hurting or discriminating against anyone or diversity group.'* It was much easier to talk to others about this contentious topic: *'Talking about discrimination and prejudice is difficult but talking about these issues by using the apple and pear activity was easier.'* The message was also simple and the participants felt that it was easy to *'convey the message without confusing or criticising other people.'* In this instance, it seems that, since they were talking about a neutral topic – the 'feelings and experiences' of apples and a pear – they felt safe enough to share their thoughts. They also did not have to prepare to talk about the topic and, because the small groups created a safe environment, the introverts might have felt more at ease.

c. Emotional safety

Another strength was the fact that the activity created a relaxed atmosphere where the participants experienced emotional safety: *'The activity made me feel safe.'* When experiencing emotional safety, it *'creates a platform where every member will express what he/she thinks of diversity and is not criticised, prejudiced or discriminated against for expressing his/her thoughts on diversity.'* The safety of the activity also helped one participant to *'discuss the issue of difference as it is often difficult for me to discuss diversity with others as I fear that people will think I am insensitive or rather that I may say something that may be too sensitive for them.'* In this relaxed, safe environment, projecting thoughts and feelings on apples and a pear clearly led to more openness from this participant. For another participant, the environment felt safe enough to discuss issues without the fear of people getting hurt: *'When you talk about these kinds of issues, it is easier when you talk in the context of apples and pears because no one gets hurt or offended but they are able to relate the activity to real life.'*

This shows that metaphors could be used to make people feel safe when discussing issues which could lead to conflict, because they talk about an object rather than about themselves and, in the process, express thoughts which, under normal circumstances, they would not have shared (Cummings and Anderson, 2010). As mentioned previously, for an adventure activity to be effective, it should include an element of perceived risk (Beard and Wilson, 2013). In this activity the risk was emotional.

d. Positive helping aid

Activities could be used to reach a variety of goals during adventure education (Project Adventure, 1995) and to introduce new and unique activities in a supportive atmosphere where all participants are motivated to contribute (Rohnke, 1989). During this activity, the apples and a pear was a helping aid to get the discussion going and to explain something as complicated as diversity: *'It was much easier to explain it practically with fruits.'* The practicality and simplicity of the activity made the concept of diversity easy to understand *'This activity is very practical and serves as a visual aid.'*

e. Fun experience

Lastly, the participants experienced the activity as fun: *'It's a simple and understandable activity which is fun when engaging in.'* Fun and humour can be used when attending to serious matters (Eppler and Carolan, 2005), especially when working adventure-based. Humour is a great tension reliever (Schoel et al., 1988), and when people have fun they just let go and do not really think about what is happening (Project Adventure, 1995), creating open and honest communication. The right hemisphere of the brain is also primed to detect and react to humour, laughter, social discourse and metaphors (Toomey and Ecker, 2007). Incorporating fun in an activity will not only make it an emotionally enjoyable experience, but will also activate learning in other parts of the brain, allowing for improved learning.

Limitations of this study include the use of a convenience sample. Although convenience sampling is used because of its low cost and its feasibility for this particular project, it could include participant bias that the researcher is not aware of. The fourth year students could have been biased to the method since they were also trained in the use of adventure based

groups when this research was conducted. This could have influenced the results. All the participants may not have been equally critical to the learning that took place, providing a rosier result than what was really achieved. Another limitation is that the age distribution of the students is not available. This could influence the replicability of this research.

It is further suggested that this study be replicated with a different sample in order to see if the same findings could be achieved. When replicated the facilitator should ensure the emotional safety of the participants as this discussion could become heated. It is further suggested that unless the facilitator is skilled in adventure education, smaller groups be used since it is easier to work with. If this isn't possible, make use of co-facilitators that would be able to move between groups and ensure depth in the discussion as well as safety. Lastly, it would also be helpful to determine if this activity has a long term impact when it comes to bias and misconceptions about others that exist in society.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to determine possible benefits of an experiential adventure-based activity and to explain how it contributes to facilitate learning and change the attitude of students when exploring diversity issues. Qualitative research was used and social work students reflected on their experience of a dialogue during an adventure-based activity.

Results show that the activity was helpful to explain and discuss diversity. The students also thought it would be a meaningful aid to use when explaining diversity to others, specifically their clients. A strong theme that emerged was that the activity helped the participants to develop better understanding of diversity as a concept. It provided them with a holistic perspective on diversity, insight into the experiences and needs of other, and increased sensitivity and respect for other people. Lastly, some strengths of the activity were discussed. The metaphor that was used contributed to the success of the activity. Furthermore, the reflective technique used in the activity contributed to participants experiencing little fear when speaking to a diverse group about their experiences and they felt emotionally safe to do that.

This article contributes to the literature of adventure education by showing that adventure-based activities in higher education could be a valuable tool in teaching sensitive topics. It is recommended that social work educators use the activities and processing techniques from adventure education to discuss thorny issues. Further research can be done on the effectiveness of these activities in teaching social work students other learning outcomes, such as effective team work, improved problem solving, and ethical and professional behaviour.

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